Esther
אסתר
merged
https://www.sefaria.org/Esther
This file contains merged sections from the following text versions:
-Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures, published by JPS
-https://jps.org/books/tanakh-the-holy-scriptures-blue/

Esther

Chapter 1

It happened in the days of Ahasuerus—that Ahasuerus who reigned over a hundred and twenty-seven provinces from India to Nubia.
In those days, when King Ahasuerus occupied the royal throne in the fortress a I.e., the fortified city. Shushan,
in the third year of his reign, he gave a banquet for all the officials and courtiers—the administration of Persia and Media, the nobles and the governors of the provinces in his service.
For no fewer than a hundred and eighty days he displayed the vast riches of his kingdom and the splendid glory of his majesty.
At the end of this period, the king gave a banquet for seven days in the court of the king’s palace garden for all the people who lived in the fortress Shushan, high and low alike.
b Meaning of part of this verse uncertain. [There were hangings of] white cotton and blue wool, caught up by cords of fine linen and purple wool to silver rods and alabaster columns; and there were couches of gold and silver on a pavement of marble, alabaster, mother-of-pearl, and mosaics.
Royal wine was served in abundance, as befits a king, in golden beakers, beakers of varied design.
And the rule for the drinking was, “No restrictions!” For the king had given orders to every palace steward to comply with each man’s wishes.
In addition, Queen Vashti gave a banquet for women, in the royal palace of King Ahasuerus.
On the seventh day, when the king was merry with wine, he ordered Mehuman, Bizzetha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven eunuchs in attendance on King Ahasuerus,
to bring Queen Vashti before the king wearing a royal diadem, to display her beauty to the peoples and the officials; for she was a beautiful woman.
But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king’s command conveyed by the eunuchs. The king was greatly incensed, and his fury burned within him.
Then the king consulted the sages learned in procedure. c Lit. “the times.” (For it was the royal practice [to turn] to all who were versed in law and precedent.
His closest advisers were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven ministers of Persia and Media who had access to the royal presence and occupied the first place in the kingdom.)
“What,” [he asked,] “shall be done, according to law, to Queen Vashti for failing to obey the command of King Ahasuerus conveyed by the eunuchs?”
Thereupon Memucan declared in the presence of the king and the ministers: “Queen Vashti has committed an offense not only against Your Majesty but also against all the officials and against all the peoples in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus.
For the queen’s behavior will make all wives despise their husbands, as they reflect that King Ahasuerus himself ordered Queen Vashti to be brought before him, but she would not come.

This very day the ladies of Persia and Media, who have heard of the queen's behavior, will cite it to all Your Majesty's officials, and there will be no end of scorn and provocation!
"If it please Your Majesty, let a royal edict be issued by you, and let it be written into the laws of Persia and Media, so that it cannot be abrogated, that Vashti shall never enter the presence of King Ahasuerus. And let Your Majesty bestow her royal state upon another who is more worthy than she.
Then will the judgment executed by Your Majesty resound throughout your realm, vast though it is; and all wives will treat their husbands with respect, high and low alike."
The proposal was approved by the king and the ministers, and the king did as Memucan proposed.
Dispatches were sent to all the provinces of the king, to every province in its own script and to every nation in its own language, that every man should wield authority in his home and speak the language of his own people.

Chapter 2

Some time afterward, when the anger of King Ahasuerus subsided, he thought of Vashti and what she had done and what had been decreed against her.
The king's servants who attended him said, "Let beautiful young virgins be sought out for Your Majesty.
Let Your Majesty appoint officers in every province of your realm to assemble all the beautiful young virgins at the fortress Shushan, in the harem under the supervision of Hege, the king's eunuch, guardian of the women. Let them be provided with their cosmetics.
And let the maiden who pleases Your Majesty be queen instead of Vashti."
The proposal pleased the king, and he acted upon it.
In the fortress Shushan lived a Jew by the name of Mordecai, son of Jair son of Shimei son of Kish, a Benjaminite.
[Kish] had been exiled from Jerusalem in the group that was carried into exile along with King Jeconiah of Judah, which had been driven into exile by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.
He was foster father to Hadassah—that is, Esther—his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother. The maiden was shapely and beautiful; and when her father and mother died, Mordecai adopted her as his own daughter.
When the king's order and edict was proclaimed, and when many girls were assembled in the fortress Shushan under the supervision of Hegai, a Identical with Hege in v. 3. Esther too was taken into the king's palace under the supervision of Hegai, guardian of the women.
The girl pleased him and won his favor, and he hastened to furnish her with her cosmetics and her rations, as well as with the seven maids who were her due from the king's palace; and he treated her and her maids with special kindness in the harem.
Esther did not reveal her people or her kindred, for Mordecai had told her not to reveal it.
Every single day Mordecai would walk about in front of the court of the harem, to learn how Esther was faring and what was happening to her.
When each girl's turn came to go to King Ahasuerus at the end of the twelve months' treatment prescribed for women (for that was the period spent on beautifying them: six months with oil of myrrh and six months with perfumes and women's cosmetics,
and it was after that that the girl would go to the king), whatever she asked for would be given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace.

She would go in the evening and leave in the morning for a second harem in charge of Shaashgaz, the king’s eunuch, guardian of the concubines. She would not go again to the king unless the king wanted her, when she would be summoned by name.
When the turn came for Esther daughter of Abihail—the uncle of Mordecai, who had adopted her as his own daughter—to go to the king, she did not ask for anything but what Hegai, the king’s eunuch, guardian of the women, advised. Yet Esther won the admiration of all who saw her.
Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, in his royal palace, in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.
The king loved Esther more than all the other women, and she won his grace and favor more than all the virgins. So he set a royal diadem on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.
The king gave a great banquet for all his officials and courtiers, “the banquet of Esther.” He proclaimed a remission of taxes b Or “an amnesty.” for the provinces and distributed gifts as befits a king.
c Meaning of verse uncertain. When the virgins were assembled a second time, Mordecai sat in the palace gate.
But Esther still did not reveal her kindred or her people, as Mordecai had instructed her; for Esther obeyed Mordecai’s bidding, as she had done when she was under his tutelage.
At that time, when Mordecai was sitting in the palace gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king’s eunuchs who guarded the threshold, became angry, and plotted to do away with King Ahasuerus.
Mordecai learned of it and told it to Queen Esther, and Esther reported it to the king in Mordecai’s name.
The matter was investigated and found to be so, and the two were impaled on stakes. This was recorded in the book of annals at the instance of the king.

Chapter 3

Some time afterward, King Ahasuerus promoted Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite; he advanced him and seated him higher than any of his fellow officials.
All the king’s courtiers in the palace gate knelt and bowed low to Haman, for such was the king’s order concerning him; but Mordecai would not kneel or bow low.
Then the king’s courtiers who were in the palace gate said to Mordecai, “Why do you disobey the king’s order?”
When they spoke to him day after day and he would not listen to them, they told Haman, in order to see whether Mordecai’s resolve would prevail; for he had explained to them that he was a Jew. a I.e., that as a Jew he could not bow to a descendant of Agag, the Amalekite king; see 1 Sam. 15, and cf. Exod. 17.14–16; Deut. 25.17–19.
When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel or bow low to him, Haman was filled with rage.
But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone; having been told who Mordecai’s people were, Haman plotted to do away with all the Jews, Mordecai’s people, throughout the kingdom of Ahasuerus.
In the first month, that is, the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, pur—which means “the lot”—was cast before Haman concerning every day and every month, [until it fell on] the twelfth month, that is, the month of Adar.
Haman then said to King Ahasuerus, “There is a certain people, scattered and dispersed among the other peoples in all the provinces of your realm, whose laws are different from those of any other people and who do not obey the king’s laws; and it is not in Your Majesty’s interest to tolerate them.

If it please Your Majesty, let an edict be drawn for their destruction, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the stewards for deposit in the royal treasury.”
Thereupon the king removed his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the foe of the Jews.
And the king said, “The money and the people are yours to do with as you see fit.”
On the thirteenth day of the first month, the king’s scribes were summoned and a decree was issued, as Haman directed, to the king’s satraps, to the governors of every province, and to the officials of every people, to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language. The orders were issued in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king’s signet.
Accordingly, written instructions were dispatched by couriers to all the king’s provinces to destroy, massacre, and exterminate all the Jews, young and old, children and women, on a single day, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month—that is, the month of Adar—and to plunder their possessions.
The text of the document was to the effect that a law should be proclaimed in every single province; it was to be publicly displayed to all the peoples, so that they might be ready for that day.
The couriers went out posthaste on the royal mission, and the decree was proclaimed in the fortress Shushan. The king and Haman sat down to feast, but the city of Shushan was dumfounded.

Chapter 4

When Mordecai learned all that had happened, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes. He went through the city, crying out loudly and bitterly,
until he came in front of the palace gate; for one could not enter the palace gate wearing sackcloth.—
Also, in every province that the king’s command and decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing, and everybody lay in sackcloth and ashes.—
When Esther’s maidens and eunuchs came and informed her, the queen was greatly agitated. She sent clothing for Mordecai to wear, so that he might take off his sackcloth; but he refused.
Thereupon Esther summoned Hathach, one of the eunuchs whom the king had appointed to serve her, and sent him to Mordecai to learn the why and wherefore of it all.
Hathach went out to Mordecai in the city square in front of the palace gate;
and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and all about the money that Haman had offered to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews.
He also gave him the written text of the law that had been proclaimed in Shushan for their destruction. [He bade him] show it to Esther and inform her, and charge her to go to the king and to appeal to him and to plead with him for her people.
When Hathach came and delivered Mordecai’s message to Esther,
Esther told Hathach to take back to Mordecai the following reply:
“All the king’s courtiers and the people of the king’s provinces know that if any person, man or woman, enters the king’s presence in the inner court without having been summoned, there is but one law for him—that he be put to death. Only if the king extends the golden scepter to him may he live. Now I have not been summoned to visit the king for the last thirty days.”
When Mordecai was told what Esther had said,

Mordecai had this message delivered to Esther: “Do not imagine that you, of all the Jews, will escape with your life by being in the king’s palace.
On the contrary, if you keep silent in this crisis, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another quarter, while you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows, perhaps you have attained to royal position for just such a crisis.”
Then Esther sent back this answer to Mordecai:
“Go, assemble all the Jews who live in Shushan, and fast in my behalf; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens will observe the same fast. Then I shall go to the king, though it is contrary to the law; and if I am to perish, I shall perish!”
So Mordecai went about [the city] and did just as Esther had commanded him.

Chapter 5

On the third day, Esther put on royal apparel and stood in the inner court of the king’s palace, facing the king’s palace, while the king was sitting on his royal throne in the throne room facing the entrance of the palace.
As soon as the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she won his favor. The king extended to Esther the golden scepter which he had in his hand, and Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter.
“What troubles you, Queen Esther?” the king asked her. “And what is your request? Even to half the kingdom, it shall be granted you.”
“If it please Your Majesty,” Esther replied, “let Your Majesty and Haman come today to the feast that I have prepared for him.”
The king commanded, “Tell Haman to hurry and do Esther’s bidding.” So the king and Haman came to the feast that Esther had prepared.
At the wine feast, the king asked Esther, “What is your wish? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to half the kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.”
“My wish,” replied Esther, “my request—
if Your Majesty will do me the favor, if it please Your Majesty to grant my wish and accede to my request—let Your Majesty and Haman come to the feast which I will prepare for them; and tomorrow I will do Your Majesty’s bidding.”
That day Haman went out happy and lighthearted. But when Haman saw Mordecai in the palace gate, and Mordecai did not rise or even stir on his account, Haman was filled with rage at him.
Nevertheless, Haman controlled himself and went home. He sent for his friends and his wife Zeresh,
and Haman told them about his great wealth and his many sons, and all about how the king had promoted him and advanced him above the officials and the king’s courtiers.
“What is more,” said Haman, “Queen Esther gave a feast, and besides the king she did not have anyone but me. And tomorrow too I am invited by her along with the king.
Yet all this means nothing to me every time I see that Jew Mordecai sitting in the palace gate.”
Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, “Let a stake be put up, fifty cubits high, and in the morning ask the king to have Mordecai impaled on it. Then you can go gaily with the king to the feast.” The proposal pleased Haman, and he had the stake put up.

Chapter 6

That night, sleep deserted the king, and he ordered the book of records, the annals, to be brought; and it was read to the king.

There it was found written that Mordecai had denounced Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king’s eunuchs who guarded the threshold, who had plotted to do away with King Ahasuerus.
“What honor or advancement has been conferred on Mordecai for this?” the king inquired. “Nothing at all has been done for him,” replied the king’s servants who were in attendance on him.
“Who is in the court?” the king asked. For Haman had just entered the outer court of the royal palace, to speak to the king about having Mordecai impaled on the stake he had prepared for him.
“It is Haman standing in the court,” the king’s servants answered him. “Let him enter,” said the king.
Haman entered, and the king asked him, “What should be done for a man whom the king desires to honor?” Haman said to himself, “Whom would the king desire to honor more than me?”
So Haman said to the king, “For the man whom the king desires to honor, let royal garb which the king has worn be brought, and a horse on which the king has ridden and on whose head a royal diadem has been set; and let the attire and the horse be put in the charge of one of the king’s noble courtiers. And let the man whom the king desires to honor be attired and paraded on the horse through the city square, while they proclaim before him: This is what is done for the man whom the king desires to honor!”
“Quick, then!” said the king to Haman. “Get the garb and the horse, as you have said, and do this to Mordecai the Jew, who sits in the king’s gate. Omit nothing of all you have proposed.”
So Haman took the garb and the horse and arrayed Mordecai and paraded him through the city square; and he proclaimed before him: This is what is done for the man whom the king desires to honor!
Then Mordecai returned to the king’s gate, while Haman hurried home, his head covered in mourning.
There Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had befallen him. His advisers and his wife Zeresh said to him, “If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish stock, you will not overcome him; you will fall before him to your ruin.”
While they were still speaking with him, the king’s eunuchs arrived and hurriedly brought Haman to the banquet which Esther had prepared.

Chapter 7

So the king and Haman came to feast with Queen Esther.
On the second day, the king again asked Esther at the wine feast, “What is your wish, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to half the kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.”
Queen Esther replied: “If Your Majesty will do me the favor, and if it pleases Your Majesty, let my life be granted me as my wish, and my people as my request.
For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, massacred, and exterminated. Had we only been sold as bondmen and bondwomen, I would have kept silent; for a Emendation yields “a trifle” (ḥiṣṣar), lit. “little finger.” the adversary -a is not worthy of the king’s trouble.”
Thereupon King Ahasuerus demanded of Queen Esther, “Who is he and where is he who dared to do this?”
“The adversary and enemy,” replied Esther, “is this evil Haman!” And Haman cringed in terror before the king and the queen.
The king, in his fury, left the wine feast for the palace garden, while Haman remained to plead with Queen Esther for his life; for he saw that the king had resolved to destroy him.
When the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet room, Haman was lying prostrate on the couch on which Esther reclined. “Does he mean,” cried the king, “to ravish the queen in my own palace?” No sooner

did these words leave the king’s lips than Haman’s face b Meaning of Heb. uncertain. Emendation yields “blanched”; cf. Ps. 34.6. was covered. -b
Then Harbonah, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, “What is more, a stake is standing at Haman’s house, fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai—the man whose words saved the king.” “Impale him on it!” the king ordered.
So they impaled Haman on the stake which he had put up for Mordecai, and the king’s fury abated.

Chapter 8

That very day King Ahasuerus gave the property of Haman, the enemy of the Jews, to Queen Esther. Mordecai presented himself to the king, for Esther had revealed how he was related to her.
The king slipped off his ring, which he had taken back from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai; and Esther put Mordecai in charge of Haman’s property.
Esther spoke to the king again, falling at his feet and weeping, and beseeching him to avert the evil plotted by Haman the Agagite against the Jews.
The king extended the golden scepter to Esther, and Esther arose and stood before the king.
“If it please Your Majesty,” she said, “and if I have won your favor and the proposal seems right to Your Majesty, and if I am pleasing to you—let dispatches be written countermanding those which were written by Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, embodying his plot to annihilate the Jews throughout the king’s provinces.
For how can I bear to see the disaster which will befall my people! And how can I bear to see the destruction of my kindred!”
Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and Mordecai the Jew, “I have given Haman’s property to Esther, and he has been impaled on the stake for scheming against the Jews.
And you may further write with regard to the Jews as you see fit. [Write it] in the king’s name and seal it with the king’s signet, for an edict that has been written in the king’s name and sealed with the king’s signet may not be revoked.”
So the king’s scribes were summoned at that time, on the twenty-third day of the third month, that is, the month of Sivan; and letters were written, at Mordecai’s dictation, to the Jews and to the satraps, the governors and the officials of the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces from India to Nubia: to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language, and to the Jews in their own script and language.
He had them written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king’s signet. Letters were dispatched by mounted couriers, riding steeds a Meaning of Heb. uncertain. used in the king’s service, bred of the royal stud, -a
to this effect: The king has permitted the Jews of every city to assemble and fight for their lives; if any people or province attacks them, they may destroy, massacre, and exterminate its armed force together with women and children, and plunder their possessions—
on a single day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, namely, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, that is, the month of Adar.
The text of the document was to be issued as a law in every single province: it was to be publicly displayed to all the peoples, so that the Jews should be ready for that day to avenge themselves on their enemies.
The couriers, mounted on royal steeds, went out in urgent haste at the king’s command; and the decree was proclaimed in the fortress Shushan.

Mordecai left the king’s presence in royal robes of blue and white, with a magnificent crown of gold and a mantle of fine linen and purple wool. And the city of Shushan rang with joyous cries.
The Jews enjoyed light and gladness, happiness and honor.
And in every province and in every city, when the king’s command and decree arrived, there was gladness and joy among the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And many of the people of the land professed to be Jews, for the fear of the Jews had fallen upon them.

Chapter 9

And so, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month—that is, the month of Adar—when the king’s command and decree were to be executed, the very day on which the enemies of the Jews had expected to get them in their power, the opposite happened, and the Jews got their enemies in their power.
Throughout the provinces of King Ahasuerus, the Jews mustered in their cities to attack those who sought their hurt; and no one could withstand them, for the fear of them had fallen upon all the peoples.
Indeed, all the officials of the provinces—the satraps, the governors, and the king’s stewards—showed deference to the Jews, because the fear of Mordecai had fallen upon them.
For Mordecai was now powerful in the royal palace, and his fame was spreading through all the provinces; the man Mordecai was growing ever more powerful.
So the Jews struck at their enemies with the sword, slaying and destroying; they wreaked their will upon their enemies.
In the fortress Shushan the Jews killed a total of five hundred men.
They also killed a Moved up from v. 10 for greater clarity. Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha,
Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha,
Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vaizatha,
the ten sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, the foe of the Jews. But they did not lay hands on the spoil.
When the number of those slain in the fortress Shushan was reported on that same day to the king,
the king said to Queen Esther, “In the fortress Shushan alone the Jews have killed a total of five hundred men, as well as the ten sons of Haman. What then must they have done in the provinces of the realm! What is your wish now? It shall be granted you. And what else is your request? It shall be fulfilled.”
“If it please Your Majesty,” Esther replied, “let the Jews in Shushan be permitted to act tomorrow also as they did today; and let Haman’s ten sons be impaled on the stake.”
The king ordered that this should be done, and the decree was proclaimed in Shushan. Haman’s ten sons were impaled:
and the Jews in Shushan mustered again on the fourteenth day of Adar and slew three hundred men in Shushan. But they did not lay hands on the spoil.
The rest of the Jews, those in the king’s provinces, likewise mustered and fought for their lives. They disposed of their enemies, killing seventy-five thousand of their foes; but they did not lay hands on the spoil.
That was on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar; and they rested on the fourteenth day and made it a day of feasting and merrymaking. (
But the Jews in Shushan mustered on both the thirteenth and fourteenth days, and so rested on the fifteenth, and made it a day of feasting and merrymaking.)
That is why village Jews, who live in unwalled towns, observe the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and make it a day of merrymaking and

feasting, and as a holiday and an occasion for sending gifts to one another.
Mordecai recorded these events. And he sent dispatches to all the Jews throughout the provinces of King Ahasuerus, near and far,
charging them to observe the fourteenth and fifteenth days of Adar, every year—
the same days on which the Jews enjoyed relief from their foes and the same month which had been transformed for them from one of grief and mourning to one of festive joy. They were to observe them as days of feasting and merrymaking, and as an occasion for sending gifts to one another and presents to the poor.
The Jews accordingly assumed as an obligation that which they had begun to practice and which Mordecai prescribed for them.
For Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the foe of all the Jews, had plotted to destroy the Jews, and had cast pur—that is, the lot—with intent to crush and exterminate them.
But when [Esther] came before the king, he commanded: b Meaning of Heb. uncertain. “With the promulgation of this decree, -b let the evil plot, which he devised against the Jews, recoil on his own head!” So they impaled him and his sons on the stake.
For that reason these days were named Purim, after pur. In view, then, of all the instructions in the said letter and of what they had experienced in that matter and what had befallen them,
the Jews undertook and irrevocably obligated themselves and their descendants, and all who might join them, to observe these two days in the manner prescribed and at the proper time each year.
Consequently, these days are recalled and observed in every generation: by every family, every province, and every city. And these days of Purim shall never cease among the Jews, and the memory of them shall never perish among their descendants.
c Force of vv. 29–31 uncertain in part. Verse 29 reads literally, “Then Queen Esther, daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew, wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter of Purim.” Then Queen Esther daughter of Abihail wrote a second letter of Purim for the purpose of confirming with full authority the aforementioned one of Mordecai the Jew.
Dispatches were sent to all the Jews in the hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the realm of Ahasuerus with an ordinance of “equity and honesty:” d I.e., of new holidays, the instituting of which is linked to love of equity and honesty in Zech. 8.19.
These days of Purim shall be observed at their proper time, as Mordecai the Jew—and now Queen Esther—has obligated them to do, and just as they have assumed for themselves and their descendants the obligation of the fasts with their lamentations. e The Jews had long been observing fast days in commemoration of national calamities; see Zech. 7.5; 8.19.
And Esther’s ordinance validating these observances of Purim was recorded in a scroll.

Chapter 10

King Ahasuerus imposed tribute on the mainland and the islands.
All his mighty and powerful acts, and a full account of the greatness to which the king advanced Mordecai, are recorded in the Annals of the Kings of Media and Persia.
For Mordecai the Jew ranked next to King Ahasuerus and was highly regarded by the Jews and popular with the multitude of his brethren; he sought the good of his people and interceded for the welfare of all his kindred.